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ABSTRACT

An astute American, knowledgeable of and sensitive to cultural diversities among Europeans can communicate effectively for business success. The results of research into the communication customs of 27 European countries are presented: the Big Three (France, Germany, United Kingdom--England, Northern Ireland, Scotland, and Wales); Western (Austria, Belgium, The Netherlands, Denmark, Finland, Greece, Ireland, Italy, Luxembourg, Norway, Portugal, Spain, Sweden, and Switzerland); and Eastern (Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Poland, Romania, Soviet Union, and Yugoslavia). The communication elements examined include: general protocol, conversation topics, appointments, gift suggestions and etiquette, and nonverbal communication techniques. (Author)

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CULTURAL DIVERSITY AMONG AMERICAN AND EUROPEAN BUSINESSPERSONS

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ABSTRACT

An astute American knowledgeable of and sensitive to cultural diversities among Europeans can communicate effectively for business success. The results of research are presented for 27 European countries: the Big Three (France, Germany, United Kingdom--England, Northern Ireland, Scotland, and Wales); Western (Austria, Belgium, The Netherlands, Denmark, Finland, Greece, Ireland, Italy, Luxembourg, Norway, Portugal, Spain, Sweden, and Switzerland); and Eastern (Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Poland, Romania, Soviet Union, and Yugoslavia. Communication elements include: general protocol, conversation topics, appointments, gift suggestions and etiquette, and nonverbal communication techniques.

INTRODUCTION

Since 1945, international business has expanded rapidly; thus, both business and pleasure travel occurred. Persons of diverse cultures interact as cross-cultural contacts and communication reencountered. Awareness of cultural diversity develops. Since persons learn cultural and ethical values early in life, cultural misunderstandings result often among these persons of different cultures. To help insure successful interaction with Europeans, Americans should prepare for European encounters at home and abroad by educating themselves about diversities among European customs, communication expectations, and ethics in advance of cultural exchanges.

Hall and Whyte suggest that when a person thinks of culture, one is likely to think in terms of dress, beliefs, and customs. These are principles in one's culture and knowledge of these is important. Hall points out, "culture is first, last, and always a matter of communication and that doesn't mean just words. We communicate with each other rather silently by our attitudes towards time, towards space,

towards power, towards personal manners and customs." Therefore, nonverbal communication is most important.

Nonverbal behavior includes:

1. Time: concerns about appointments, workhours and schedules

2. Body language: eye contact, facial expressions (showing respect, power, submissiveness); haptics (touch); kinesics (movement)

Nonverbal comparisons have existed for many groups with the American culture. However, little has been collected dealing with the European community as a whole. As 1992 approaches, the quest for accurate business information on European companies grows. Therefore, these researchers sought information about cultural differences through literature review and interviews with 100 expatriates with European experience.

Data Collection and Results

Information about general business protocol and ethics is presented for 27 European countries. Countries are categorized as The Big Three, Western Europe, and Eastern Europe. The Big Three consists of: France, Germany, and the United Kingdom (UK). Countries within the UK are England, Northern Ireland, Scotland, and Wales. Western Europe as presented includes 14 countries. They are: Austria, Belgium, The Netherlands, Denmark, Finland, Greece, Ireland, Italy, Luxembourg, Norway, Portugal, Spain, Sweden, and Switzerland. Eastern Europe as presented includes seven countries. They are: Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Poland, Romania, Russia, and Yugoslavia.

Gift Giving

When purchasing gifts to take from the United States, knowledge of cultural preferences and of the person specifically are important. Gift items of quality, books of history, art, theatre, sports, or books with an emphasis on the latest biographical, historical, criticism, and even memoirs of the United States presidents and statesmen especially those United States officials who have been very popular with the specific country where the gift will be given. Quality silver or porcelain, the other person's favorite brand of wine or liquor or quality chocolates are appropriate. Cards should be enclosed, not attached to the outside of a wrapped gift. The card should have a handwritten message. Avoid wrapping gifts in white, brown, or black paper.

When invited to someone's home, seasonal flowers (odd number, except 13, usually seven or less) are appreciated. In most instances, they should be sent prior to visit so that they can be arranged before guests arrive or take prearranged season bouquets. Red roses, carnations, and white lilies should not be given nor included in seasonal flower gifts for ordinary business purposes.

Giving and/or receiving gifts is a frequent occurrence throughout Europe. Many of the European countries have similar types of appropriate gifts; however, people of some of the countries have some unique types of gifts that they give. For example, the Irish appreciate handcrafted gifts, while the French give gifts that appeal to the intellect, and the Greeks appreciate praise of their children, which can be considered the best gift.

Learn as much as possible about the potential recipient's gift preferences prior to making a purchase. Many, most Frenchmen particularly, feel obligated to display the gift. When something that doesn't "please or fit in" is displayed, it serves as a constant reminder that the giver did not do one's "homework" thoroughly. The extra effort can be invaluable to business and friendships.

Protocol Among Europeans/Greetings

According to the office of the Chief of Protocol at the U.S. Department of State, protocol is described as being the body of accepted practices among nations as they interact; subsequently, the recognized system of internal courtesy. A need for an international standard of behavior has been made evident in the course of history. During the eighteenth century, history tells of a court ball in London where a French and Russian ambassador quarreled violently over their respective places at the table. The two then commenced their argument into a duel match, in which the Russian ambassador was wounded. Though disagreements over places at the table today would be improbable cause for an international incident, common procedures and practices have developed that reflect the mutual respect and consideration one nation shows another.

In Europe, more reserve, formality, and erect posture are expected. Brief specifics are shown in Table 1 for 10 Western European Countries.

General Protocol for Western European Countries

Austria	Recognize their distinct accomplishments and contributions internationally. Very proud. They enjoy conversation about current affairs. Always polite to greet people in public, even strangers.
Belgium	Privacy is a jealously guarded right and is carefully respected.
Netherlands	Perhaps the most formal European culture. European. Toast is just before or just after first sip of drink, ultraclean; very open,straight forward. Avoid tips to taxi drivers.
Denmark	Toasting with a skoal; directly to individual or whole crowd. Very polite; formal. Men need tuxedo, as senior businessmen stage more black tie dinners than any other culture. Avoid tipping taxi drivers. Attempting business in July/August. Be aware of potency of aquavit "water of life."
Finland	Informal, toasts are frequent at beginning of meal. When men are invited to take a sauna with the host, do so. Women with women. This is a national pastime. Avoid tipping taxi driver.
Iceland	First names. Appointments not necessary usually. Tradition of "stopping in" prevails. Very impolite to use an Icelander's surname. Tips are an insult.
Norway	Very polite; formal. Be prepared with specifics. Avoid appointments in July, August, or early September. Do not drink and drive.
Portugal	Informal and sociable; late for appointments is to be expected.

Spain — Be prepared with specifics and for late dinner. (Restaurants open after 9 pm; get into full "swing" about 11 pm.)

Sweden — Very polite, formal. More liberal, social and political. Toasting is more formal than in the other Scandinavian countries. For example, Swedish host may be impressed when you know the rules:

* never toast host or anyone senior in rank or age until that person toasts.
* Don't touch your drink until the host has said skoal.
* To be very, very proper, the skoal motion is: move the glass from the waistline up to the eyes, look the other person directly in the eyes, say skoal, drink, make a wave of the glass toward your host's eyes, and bring it back down to the table. Do not drink and drive.

Other general protocol diversities include:

1. Appointments are expected to be made in writing well in advance with the appointments and should be confirmed a day or so prior to the appointment and punctuality is very important with one arriving 10 minutes prior to the appointment time, especially in Germany and Norway.

Punctuality is more pronounced in Germany than any other European country. Be sure to cancel or postpone by phone, if one must be late. The U. S. businessperson should be prepared to be kept waiting up to 45 minutes, especially for the first few visits. Also, lunch hours for many executives are typically two hours long. Therefore, afternoon appointments should be requested after 2:30 p.m.

2. With few exceptions, the handshake serves as standard greetings but involves light pressure and consists of only a single shake. State one's name slowly the first time one shakes hands. Listen carefully and repeat the other one's name. The U. S. firmness and arm pumping are impolite unless otherwise noted, with the person of highest status or senior person offers to shake hands first; however, a woman offers her hand to the man. While the handshake is used during the farewell, avoid excessive use of hands, as well as other gestures. Do not ask, "What do you do?"

Be very courteous, polite, appreciative. Keep attitude positive, but not unrealistic. Be very knowledgeable of technical facts about one's own business. Be specific, clear, and concise.

3. Be knowledgeable of current events--theirs and one's own. In most countries, do not discuss politics, personal affairs, nor income.

Formal Introductions

With forms of address, first names are rarely used at first with Europeans, and then they are still not used without invitation which usually comes only after long association. In northern Europe even the title of Mr. Mrs. or Miss often isn't formal enough. Those with academic titles and degrees expect you to use them as a sign of respect. Likewise, lawyers are addressed as "the honorable lawyer" and doctors as "Mr. Doctor" or "Mrs. or Miss Doctor."

According to the protocol of Europeans with introductions several expectations differ from those in the United States. The older, more important or ranking guest offers his hand to a younger guest, and women offer their hands to men. Men on occasion still gallantly kiss a woman's hand. A women should extend her hand in the usual manner and not offer up limp fingers waiting to be kissed.

A man faced with such an offering will do better to shake the hand lightly rather than attempt a kiss. The firm, pumping American handshake is considered impolite.

In regard to address to foreign government officials and nobility, four differences between European and American forms of address. (1) The American formal form: "My dear Mr. Ambassador" is never used in a letter to a British person with whim one is not on intimate terms. Instead, one writes "Dear Mr. Ambassador." (2) The title "Madame" is used before the name of the wife of a French official in any other country. (3) Anyone who communicates often in business or in government with the Italians learns to call them by their Italian titles. (4) When a woman is titles, she is not addresses as Madame, but rather with her title before her last name.

Greetings and Communicating Gestures

In Europe, as well as in the states, the shaking of the hands is an almost universal greeting. Usually one shakes hands on arrival, when being introduced, and when saying good-bye. Also, one should say "how-do-you-do" and "good-bye" to all the guests at any type of engagement by European custom.

As a week-end guest, one is expected to shake hands with one's host and fellow guests at least twice a day, every day. Properly, this is done when one says good morning and again when one says good night. Millicant Fenwick states that "The importance of this matter of shaking hands cannot be over-emphasized and it is considered extremely rude and unusual not to follow the custom. See Table 2 for basic nonverbal expressions.

European countries and their appropriate greeting manners. For instance, in Germany always greet people in public, even if they are complete strangers. However, Austrians feel just the opposite and find this greeting unacceptable. In Belgium, men embrace each other. Also kissing three times, alternating on each cheek, is an appropriate greeting. One should by no means try this in Finland. There one may shake hands with men and women, may use both hands sometimes; however, other physical contact is avoided. In Greece, one doesn't have to worry about a specific type of greeting because many are acceptable. The hand shake, embrace and/or kiss at the first and at every encounter are all acceptable and are not considered informal. Also, in Portugal men may greet each other with the mutual slapping on the backs and enthusiastic hugging, while women will usually greet with the kissing of cheeks.

An unusual custom in West Germany is used when answering the phone. Instead of saying "hello," one answers by stating the last name. In regard to business transactions in Europe common procedure with introductions is to exchange business cards, in a manner similar to the United States. Average business hours, average hours worked weekly, expectations regarding business appointments, arrival punctuality, social courtesies, acceptable gifts, after work-day expectations, haptics (physical contact), oculesics (eye contact), binesics, and general attitude are presented. General ethic practices as related to work, religion, and family are presented.

Average hours worked weekly, business hours, expectation regarding business appointments, arrival punctuality, social courtesies, acceptable gifts, and nonverbal variables are presented. With respect to protocol according to Roger Axtell one thing that Europeans take notice of, especially in the business sense, is punctuality. He says that punctuality is a must. For example, when an appointment in Germany is for 8:00, they will expect you at 7:55.

Nonverbal Communication Techniques in Five Western European Countries

Belgium	Use handshake: greetings, frequently during meetings, and farewells. Avoid the fingersnap which connotes vulgarity.
Netherlands	Use appropriate facial expressions and eye contact. Avoid: (1) tapping one elbow means "He's unreliable". (2) Sweeping or grabbing hand toward one's body signifies "stealing" or "trying to get away with something."
Finland	Eye contact is very important. Maintain space between yourself and others. Avoid haptics.
Greece	Slight upward head motion means "no," not "yes." Solemn face. May smile not only when happy, but also when very angry. Cheek stroke means "attractive." Avoid: (1) waving (moutza) is a serious insult. (2) Tossing one's head backward signifies negation. (3) Fingers circled (U. S. okay sign).
Italy	Handshaking and gesturing are national pastimes. Cheek's screw by pointing index finger at one's own cheek and rotating hand signifies praise. The national gesture appears to be made by holding one's hand upward and bringing thumb and fingers together vertically. It can mean "good," "fear," or "question." Italians gestulate wildly, their shoulders arms, and hands convulsing in tempo with their voices.

Other nonverbal communication techniques include: Czeckoslavakia: head movements as nodding forward/backward means "no" while turning head from side to side means "yes."

In France use direct eye contact and even direct stares. Avoid fingersnap which is vulgar, fingers circled (U.S. okay sign) means zero or worthless in Southern France. A woman does not extend hand first.

In England, the "V" used internationally as a peace symbol is made with the palm toward the audience. When made with the palm toward self, it means "shove it" to others.

Business Hours

While business hours generally range from 9 a.m. to 6 p.m., Monday through Friday, one should check with the specific business. In general banks may close about 3 p.m. Sample length of workweeks include England, 44 hours; Austria, 34.4 hours (one of the shortest in the world); Finland, 35.8 hours; Iceland, 37.5; Greece, 39.1; Hungary, 42; and Bulgaria, 52.5 hours. Throughout Europe, traditional "holiday" season occurs in July, August, and early September; therefore, one may want to avoid scheduling appointments during this season.

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